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Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Iraq

Summary

The present report was prepared pursuant to Security Council resolutions 1612 (2005) and 1882 (2009). It is the first report on the situation of children and armed conflict in Iraq to be presented to the Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. It covers the period from January 2008 to December 2010.

The report highlights trends and patterns of grave violations committed against children in the context of the continuing conflict in Iraq, such as the recruitment and use of children; including use of children as suicide bombers, the killing and maiming of children and attacks on schools and hospitals. The report also identifies parties to the conflict responsible for such grave violations.

The report appreciates the security challenges facing the United Nations and child protection stakeholders in Iraq, and notes that access to affected populations and children for monitoring and verification purposes was not consistent. The report welcomes the efforts of the Government of Iraq to address some of the child protection concerns during the reporting period. The report also highlights areas for advocacy and response, and concludes with a series of recommendations to all parties in order to address remaining challenges and further enhance child protection.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report, prepared pursuant to Security Council resolutions 1612 (2005) and 1882 (2009), covers the period from January 2008 to December 2010 and highlights trends and patterns of violations committed against children in the context of the continuing conflict in Iraq. It is presented to the Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict as the first country report on Iraq from the country task force on monitoring and reporting, which was formally established in June 2010. The report identifies parties to the conflict responsible for grave violations and abuses committed against children and highlights areas for advocacy and response to enhance the protection of children affected by the conflict in Iraq. The report also contains recommendations to all parties to the conflict.

2. The volatile security environment and the lack of access to affected populations and areas most affected by the conflict have significantly hindered the monitoring and reporting activities during the reporting period. As a result, incidents and trends described below may only reflect some of the grave violations committed against children in Iraq.

3. In March 2009 the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2009/158) listed Al-Qaida in Iraq as a party that recruits, trains and uses children to conduct military-related operations in Iraq. In the same month, the establishment of the country task force on monitoring and reporting for Iraq was endorsed by the United Nations country team. The task force convened for the first time in June 2010 and subsequently met with the Government of Iraq, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to formally introduce it to the monitoring and reporting process.

II. Political, military and social developments in Iraq

A. General overview

4. Parliamentary elections took place in Iraq in March 2010 and the final result was declared at the end of May 2010. That result was contested and a series of negotiations followed, which led to an agreement by the main political parties and the announcement in December 2010 of a new government led by Prime Minister Al-Maliki.

5. Considerable security challenges remain for the United Nations operations on the ground, which are being addressed in close cooperation with the Iraqi security forces. Movements continued to be limited, including in some areas of Baghdad, with consequences on the overall child protection efforts, as well as monitoring and verification activities. Security of staff also remains compromised. On 25 October 2010, insurgents using explosive devices attacked a convoy carrying my Special Representative for Iraq and the Deputy Special Representative while they were travelling from Najaf. As a result of the attack, two members of the Iraqi security forces died and several others were injured.

6. During the reporting period, security agreements between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of Iraq came into effect, according to which the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq will be completed

by December 2011. The Iraqi security forces have assumed full responsibility for security since June 2009. Civilian casualties as a result of the conflict continued to be high during the reporting period, but have decreased overall from 2008 onwards. In 2008, the Government of Iraq reported that 6,787 civilians were killed and 20,178 wounded, including 376 children killed and 1,594 injured. In 2009, it was reported that 4,068 civilians were killed and 15,935 wounded, including 362 children killed and 1,044 wounded. For the first nine months of 2010, the Government of Iraq reported to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) 2,558 civilians killed and 11,129 wounded, including 134 children killed and 590 wounded.

7. The humanitarian situation in Iraq has moved from an emergency context to one of fragile early recovery. However, continued violence has destroyed the social services infrastructure and access to basic services, such as water and sanitation, health care and education, remains limited especially for children. Traditional systems of physical, social and legal protection have also been severely compromised by the conflict and, as a result, children have become more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

B. Armed forces and armed groups operating in Iraq

Iraqi security forces

Iraqi army

8. The Iraqi Army operates under the authority of the Ministry of Defence. It has a strength of approximately 250,000 soldiers. Under an agreement with the Central Government, the Iraqi Army's area of operations is restricted to governorates outside of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, where such activities are undertaken by the Peshmerga. Iraq is a party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The minimum age of recruitment for the Iraqi army is 18 years.

Iraqi police

9. Formally known as the Iraqi Police Service, the Iraqi police is tasked with law enforcement in Iraq. It is the primary means of the Government of Iraq to address issues of law and order. Under the control of the Ministry of the Interior, the Iraqi police has a strength of approximately 400,000 uniformed officers. The Iraqi police also has a branch within its services known as the Federal Police, which is tasked to fight terrorism and armed groups and addresses the gap between the civilian police and the Iraqi military. The minimum age of recruitment for the Iraqi police is 18. The area of operations of the Iraqi police is restricted to governorates outside of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, where such activities are undertaken by the Kurdistan Region police.

Peshmerga

10. The Peshmerga is the armed force of the Kurdistan Regional Government and is part of the Iraqi federal defence structure, with strength of approximately 200,000 soldiers. It is based in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, but, at the request of the Government of Iraq, it has deployed units to areas outside of the region, including Mosul and Baghdad, to assist the Iraqi security forces. Additionally, the Peshmerga

is present in areas with contested administrative boundaries, such as Kirkuk, Diyala and Ninewa Governorates.

The Awakening Councils

11. The Awakening Councils (also known as the "Sons of Iraq") consist of Sunni tribes whose leadership broke away from Al-Qaida in Iraq in 2005. The movement started in Anbar Governorate and quickly spread to other governorates. According to an agreement with the Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I), the Awakening Councils would provide security in areas under their control and expel Al-Qaida in Iraq. They were and remain a key element in combating the insurgency. The Awakening Councils reached a strength of over 100,000, primarily in Baghdad, and remain present in most of Iraq, with the exception of the Kurdistan Region. Originally supported by MNF-I, by 2009 the responsibility for the Awakening Councils had been transferred to the Ministry of Defence, which provides salaries, with the aim of their eventual integration into the Iraqi security forces or other Government agencies. As at August 2010, approximately 40 per cent of Awakening Council members had been given new employment with the Government or had joined the private sector; the remainder continues to provide security functions under the control of the Ministry of Defence.

Anti-Government armed groups

12. The conflict in Iraq involves a number of insurgent groups. Those listed by the Secretary-General as being responsible for grave violations against children are described below.

Al-Qaida in Iraq

13. Al-Qaida was reportedly founded in 2003. The group seeks the withdrawal of foreign forces from Iraq and the establishment of an Islamic caliphate. The exact size of its membership remains difficult to ascertain owing to its clandestine nature. Operations conducted by Al-Qaida tend to concentrate around the areas of Baghdad, Diyala, Salah ad-Din, Mosul and in Al-Anbar Governorate, with periodic attacks against Shia communities in southern Iraq. Al-Qaida regularly carries out indiscriminate attacks with the aim of terrorizing the population and/or targeted attacks against military, Government and civilian targets. It claimed responsibility for the attack against the United Nations in Baghdad in August 2003 that killed 22 United Nations personnel. In 2006, Al-Qaida became a part of the armed group Islamic State of Iraq.

Islamic State of Iraq

14. Islamic State of Iraq is an insurgent group, created in 2006, that is comprised of a number of other armed groups in Iraq, including Al-Qaida. It claims to have established a provisional Islamic state in Iraq and to have unified Sunni insurgent groups under goals similar to those of Al-Qaida. It regularly claims responsibility for large scale mass casualty attacks against Government and civilian targets in Baghdad, including the bombings of Government buildings in October 2009 that killed 155 people, and 125 people in December of the same year, as well as the attack against a church that killed 55 people in October 2010 in Baghdad.

International Military Forces

Multi-National Force-Iraq

15. International military forces present in Iraq were led by the United States of America under MNF-I from 15 May 2004 to 1 January 2010. MNF-I was mandated by Security Council resolution 1546 (2004), and was subsequently extended by resolutions 1637 (2005), 1723 (2006) and 1790 (2007). Troops from 40 countries were part of MNF-I, with the single largest troop-contributing nation being the United States of America, which had 165,000 soldiers deployed in Iraq at the peak of the conflict in 2007. By August 2009, all States other than the United States had withdrawn their troops. With the aim of transferring the responsibility for security from MNF-I to the Government of Iraq, the United States-Iraq status of forces agreement was signed between Iraq and the United States in December 2008. The key features of the agreement were MNF-I ceasing all combat operations by August 2010 and the withdrawal of all American troops from Iraq by December 2011.

United States Forces in Iraq

16. On 1 January 2010, MNF-I was deactivated and replaced by United States Forces in Iraq (USF-I). On 9 August, the last MNF-I combat unit left Iraq, although a number of support troops remain and are now part of USF-I. They are tasked with training members of the Iraqi security forces, conducting counter-terrorism operations, and providing protection for United States military and civilian personnel. By November 2010, the remaining USF-I troop strength in Iraq was approximately 50,000 troops.

III. Visit of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the monitoring and reporting mechanism

17. My Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict visited Iraq from 13 to 25 April 2008, upon the invitation of the Government of Iraq. The visit aimed at assessing first-hand the situation of children affected by the conflict in Iraq and to advocate for better protection of children. The Special Representative met with children from internally displaced families, NGOs, teachers, Government officials, UNAMI staff and protection partners in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Region.

18. She also held discussions with MNF-I on detention procedures and due process for minors in MNF-I custody. In her discussions with UNAMI it was agreed that greater efforts should be made to establish appropriate child protection policies, including an improved monitoring and reporting mechanism that would expand to conflict-affected areas as well as the need for additional child protection advisers.

IV. Grave violations of children's rights: incidents and trends

A. Recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups

19. Throughout the conflict in Iraq, armed groups have recruited, trained and used children to take part in hostilities both directly and indirectly. Children have been

used to spy and scout, transport military supplies and equipment, videotape attacks for propaganda purposes, plant explosive devices and actively engage in attacks against security forces and civilians. The exact number of children recruited and used by armed groups in Iraq remains difficult to ascertain because of the restrictive security situation.

20. Information received from community leaders, Government officials, security forces and national and international child protection partners demonstrates that children have been systematically used by insurgent groups. For example, on 12 June 2009, a member of the Council of Representatives, and Deputy Chairman of the Human Rights Committee, was killed inside a mosque in Baghdad. The attack was allegedly carried out by a 15-year-old boy armed with a pistol. Reports also indicate that the Iraqi security forces and MNF-I/USF-I have encountered children engaged in combat activities. For instance, in May 2009, a joint Iraqi police and MNF-I patrol in Hawija District, Kirkuk, was attacked by a boy estimated to be between the ages of 14 and 16, who threw a grenade at the patrol. On 1 June 2009, in the same area, another joint patrol was attacked by a 15-year-old boy, who claimed he had been paid by insurgents to throw a grenade at the patrol.

21. Children were used as suicide bombers by insurgent groups, including Al-Qaida in Iraq, throughout the reporting period. Children are used as suicide bombers allegedly because they arouse less suspicion and it is considered to be easier for them to move through security checkpoints than for adults. In some instances, children have allegedly unknowingly been proxy bombers, carrying explosives intended to be remotely detonated. In 2008, an official of the Ministry of the Interior publicly claimed that Al-Qaida in Iraq had used 24 children as suicide bombers in the previous two years. In May 2008 it was reported that insurgents strapped explosives to an eight-year-old girl and detonated them remotely as she approached an Iraqi army position south of Baghdad, killing her and a soldier and wounding seven others. In the same month, a 12-year-old suicide bomber killed at least 23 people at the funeral of a police officer in Fallujah. In September 2008, a 15-year-old detonated his explosives among a pro-government armed group north of Baghdad. Information shows that the practice continued in 2009 and 2010. For example, in May 2009, a 14-year-old boy detonated his explosives in Kirkuk, killing himself and five police officers, and wounding 11 civilians. In April 2010, a 10-year-old boy was arrested by the police before he could detonate his explosives in Fallujah. He claimed that he had been instructed by three men linked to Al-Qaida in Iraq to conduct suicide operations.

22. Since 2008, there have been consistent reports that Al-Qaida in Iraq operates a youth wing for children under the age of 15 called "Birds of Paradise" (also referred to as "Paradise Boys" or "Youth of Heaven") to carry out suicide attacks. Information on this armed wing remains scarce because of the clandestine nature of the group, but reports indicate that Al-Qaida in Iraq deliberately targets vulnerable children for forced recruitment such as orphans, street children and those mentally disabled. For example, in April 2009, it was reported that four children under the age of 14 were arrested by the Iraqi security forces near Kirkuk. They had been trained to avoid detection when approaching their targets, and allegedly identified themselves as members of the Birds of Paradise. In April 2010, it was reported that the Iraqi security forces arrested a senior leader of Al-Qaida in Iraq on suspicion of being involved in the recruitment of children as suicide bombers as part of the Birds of Paradise. A senior Iraq army official added that "the Birds of Paradise group was

directly responsible for recruiting children under 15, brainwashing them, and convincing them to carry out suicide operations — or even deceiving them by placing explosives around their bodies, sending them to markets, and then blowing them up using a remote control".

23. Children have also unknowingly been used to lure security forces into ambushes. For example, in August 2010 armed gunmen reportedly entered a house in Sadiyah, north of Baghdad, killed an adult male and two females, and sent two children, 10 and 12 years old, to report the attack to the Iraqi security forces. When the Iraqi army and police came to investigate, explosives planted in the house by the insurgents killed eight soldiers and wounded four. The two children were not injured and were later placed in the care of relatives.

24. With respect to the Awakening Councils, the United Nations and its partners received reports in 2009 that approximately 350 children were working for the Councils, although these reports could not be verified owing to security constraints.

25. There have also been persistent reports that the Mahdi Army actively recruited and used children as soldiers since the beginning of the conflict. A spokesperson for the group, Sheikh Ahmad al-Shabani, stated support for the practice of using children in an interview in 2004, and also stated that boys as young as 15 were involved with the group. The armed group disbanded voluntarily in August 2008, but spokesmen for the group have publicly threatened that it may reconstitute itself if foreign forces do not leave Iraq as planned in 2011.

Detention of children for alleged association with armed groups

26. A large number of children were detained by MNF-I on suspicion of posing threats to security. This number decreased significantly during the reporting period, as MNF-I transferred authority for detention to the Government of Iraq under the requirements of the United States-Iraq status of forces agreement. The agreement stated that MNF-I no longer retained authority to detain individuals, and subsequently required that juveniles either be released or, if sufficient evidence existed, be transferred to the Iraqi justice system for processing. MNF-I reported that 874 children were detained in December 2007, approximately 500 in mid-May 2008, 50 as at the end of December 2008, and none in June 2010. While systematic monitoring of all detention facilities under the authority of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has yet to be implemented, the monitoring and reporting mechanism ascertained in June 2010 in two of Baghdad's detention centres the presence of some 150 children detained owing to alleged association with armed groups, constituting more than 70 per cent of the total children incarcerated there.

B. Killing or maiming of children

27. Children continue to be killed and maimed in Iraq, as they remain exposed to a wide range of risks as a result of the conflict. In 2008, according to figures provided by the Government of Iraq, 376 children were killed and 1,594 were wounded; in 2009 it was reported that 362 children were killed and 1,044 wounded. For 2010, the monitoring and reporting mechanism of the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting documented that at least 194 children were killed and 232 wounded as a result of the conflict, while the official figures from the Government of Iraq for the first nine months of 2010 report that 134 children were killed and 590 wounded,

primarily in Baghdad, Diyala and Ninewa Governorates. It should be noted that figures from the task force and the Government of Iraq differ because access to affected populations and methodologies are not always similar.

28. Children have also been killed or maimed after being caught in the crossfire between insurgent groups and military or police forces engaged in combat or checkpoint confrontations. However, most of the killing and maiming of children is owed to indiscriminate large scale bomb and suicide attacks by insurgent groups such as Al-Qaida in Iraq and Islamic State of Iraq, who target public areas, including markets, mosques and places of recreation, where children tend to gather. Following are a few examples:

(i) On 20 June 2009, a suicide bomber targeted a Shia mosque used by the Turkmen community in Tazaa, south of Kirkuk, killing 82 people, including 17 children;

(ii) On 10 August 2009, two truck bombs were detonated in Shabak in Nineva Governorate, killing or injuring 177 civilians, including 76 children;

(iii) On 26 March 2010, 23 children were killed when bombs destroyed a coffee shop and a restaurant in Khalis, Diyala Governorate;

(iv) On 14 May 2010, in Ninewa, five children were killed and 30 injured when suicide bombers attacked civilians at a soccer stadium;

(v) In August 2010, a series of coordinated explosions in a market in Basra killed 45 civilians, including a 12-year-old girl, and injured over 180 people, including 13 boys and 11 girls between the ages of 10 and 15;

(vi) In October 2010, three children were reportedly among the 55 people killed in an attack against a church in Baghdad, for which Islamic State of Iraq claimed responsibility.

29. Children are also victims of insurgents' high profile attacks against public institutions, in particular ministries and police stations, purportedly perpetrated in an effort to destabilize the Government of Iraq and undermine its ability to provide services to citizens. Deliberate attacks on the homes and families of Government, military or police officials by insurgent groups have also resulted in death and injury to children. For instance, in April 2010, two boys were reportedly beheaded by insurgents who attacked the home of a police official in Salahuddin. In May 2010, the daughter of a man who was employed by the Iraqi army was killed when unknown gunmen stormed his house in Kirkuk. Also, in August 2010, two sons of a member of the Iraqi police, aged 10 and 12, were killed in Fallujah in an attack on their house. The Iraqi security forces have also been reported to be responsible for the deaths of children in crossfire incidents when attempting to arrest suspects in their homes: in September 2010, it was reported that Iraqi security forces stormed a house in Fallujah and eight persons were killed, including at least two children.

30. A consistent threat to children are explosive remnants of war, which continue to claim the lives of children and cause injury long after combat operations have taken place. It is estimated that 2.66 million cluster bombs and 20 million landmines remain in Iraqi soil, contaminating 1,700 square kilometres of land. Many date from previous conflicts, such as the Iran-Iraq war and the first Gulf War.

C. Rape or other grave sexual violence against children

31. Incidents of rape or grave sexual violence against children in Iraq connected with the armed conflict are extremely difficult to verify and gathering information on this violation remains a consistent challenge. The main factors are the security situation and the limitations on access it imposes, a reluctance to report incidents out of fear of being stigmatized, and the absence of available and safe reporting mechanisms for children in a number of regions. Additionally, traditional child protection partners — such as the police — have been engaged in combating insurgents and thus may not have been able to direct their full attention to the issue of rape or grave sexual violence against children.

D. Abduction of children

32. The abduction of children remains a serious concern. In 2009 alone, the Ministry of Interior estimated that at least 265 children were abducted and issued several public warnings. In response, the Ministry of Education instructed schools to take precautions, and security patrols and checkpoints around schools were increased. Owing to the sensitivity of release negotiations, once a child has been abducted many of these incidents are not reported to the authorities, as parents feel this would give a greater chance for the successful release of their children.

33. Incidents of abductions by insurgents remain difficult to verify, especially because of the clandestine nature of their activities, the lack of reporting and the fact that it is often challenging to distinguish whether the abductors are insurgents or criminals. The Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting has, however, continuously received reports of the abduction of children by armed groups to finance their violent activities, and in one particular case, to obtain the release of prisoners. In October 2010, armed men wearing military uniforms attacked a house in south-western Kirkuk and kidnapped two girls aged 16 and 17. The house belonged to an influential family from a local tribe. The kidnappers demanded that the family request the release of five women associated with their group arrested on charges of terrorist activities. The two girls were later released after the authorities in Kirkuk reportedly released the five women. Additionally, between November and December 2010, three incidents of abduction in Kirkuk were reported, including the case of a boy whose father worked for an Awakening Council and who was abducted and questioned by unknown armed men regarding his father's activities. The boy was released the following day.

E. Attacks on schools or hospitals

34. During the first five years of conflict in Iraq, educational facilities were heavily targeted. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in the early stages of the conflict in 2003 and 2004 more than one in six schools in Iraq were vandalized, damaged or destroyed. Owing to the lack of infrastructure and to overcrowded classrooms, one third of schools are forced to deliver lessons in two or even three shifts, with acute shortages of essential teaching/learning materials.

35. Children's access to education has been compromised by the security situation. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization National

Education Support Strategy released in 2008 estimated that 2 million children of primary school age did not attend school largely owing to the security situation. Direct attacks against schools also continue to occur, and in some cases schools have been the target of suicide bombers. For instance, on 22 January 2008, a suicide bomber detonated his explosives at the entrance of a school in Ba'qubah, injuring 17 students and 4 teachers. Schools have also been affected by explosive devices being placed in them or in their vicinity. For example, on 27 March 2008, unidentified armed elements blew up a school in Saydiyah, in south-western Baghdad. On 7 December 2009, in Sadr City, explosives hidden in a rubbish pile outside a school were detonated, killing 5 boys and injuring 17 children.

36. Threats and intimidation also prevent children's access to schools. Many of these threats were reported to have come from insurgent groups that demand the schools change the curriculum or deny rights to students from certain ethnic or religious groups. Failure to comply often led to violence. In May 2008, for instance, it was alleged that an armed group operating in Sadr City had closed 86 schools and threatened employees and students not to go to school and families not to send their children to school. It was reported in 2008 that schools in Sadr City were being used as bases of operations for insurgent activities. More recently, in October 2010 as a result of the attack claimed by Islamic State of Iraq against a church in Baghdad, many Christian schools, often sharing the same grounds as their churches, reportedly cancelled classes for several weeks for fear of similar attacks.

37. Hospitals have suffered damage or been closed as a result of military operations and have also been directly targeted by insurgent groups. For example, on 24 October 2010, explosives placed in a parked vehicle exploded inside the Ibn Sina Hospital compound in Mosul. Four children were killed and 9 below the age of 14 were among the 30 persons wounded.

38. The direct targeting of medical staff has also dire consequences for the provision of health-care services. In 2008, it was reported that as a result of the conflict 2,200 doctors and nurses had been killed and 250 kidnapped since 2003 and that many had also been threatened by armed groups and forced to leave their jobs, leading to a lack of trained professionals in the health-care sector.

F. Denial of humanitarian access

39. Humanitarian access for children remained problematic in areas affected by the conflict. Military operations, intimidation by armed groups, and the climate of fear created by indiscriminate attacks means that in some areas children lacked access, or had only partial access, to basic assistance and services related to water, sanitation, food and health care. The Al-Qaida in Iraq and Islamic State of Iraq tactic of attacking Government institutions further compounded the problem of access to services and humanitarian assistance by creating a gap between those in need and government services.

40. The security situation also impacted the ability of humanitarian actors to access children to deliver services. During the reporting period, Iraq remained a volatile security environment for national and international humanitarian actors. Reports were consistently received of humanitarian staff, including United Nations staff, being threatened, harassed and intimidated by armed groups, with the result

that some humanitarian actors were unwilling to enter high risk areas to provide services to potential beneficiaries.

V. Dialogue and action plans to redress violations and abuses committed against children

41. The delay in the formation of the new government in Iraq after the March 2010 elections resulted in the absence of formal dialogue on children affected by armed conflict between the United Nations and the Government of Iraq. However, UNAMI senior management engaged with the Government of Iraq on monitoring and reporting and established a communication channel on the issue through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On 13 January 2011, my Special Representative and the UNICEF Representative, met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs to initiate such discussions and introduced the Security Council resolution 1612 process regarding the implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism in Iraq. It was requested that the Minister appoint a high-level representative to liaise with the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting. The Minister agreed to the request and welcomed the implementation of the mechanism in the framework of Security Council resolutions 1612 (2005) and 1882 (2009). Further to that request, and in an effort to support the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the work with the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting on issues related to children in armed conflict, the Government of Iraq established an intergovernmental committee on Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) in April 2011. The committee is chaired by the Ministry of Human Rights, with representatives from the Ministries of Defence, Foreign Affairs, Justice, Labour and Social Affairs, Education and the Interior.

VI. Follow-up and programmatic response to violations and abuses committed against children

42. The continuing conflict and the resulting violence and insecurity have greatly weakened, and in some cases destroyed, institutions and systems for the physical, social and legal protection of children. From 2008 to the present, the Government of Iraq, United Nations agencies and NGOs have developed partnerships in order to increase assistance to victims in the form of psychological support, social and reintegration assistance. Despite some success in responding to the needs of children, child protection has yet to be fully articulated in government policies and priorities, such as in the National Development Plan. Protection partners are currently providing assistance to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs for the development of a child protection policy. Technical capacity of protection service providers such as social workers and caregivers in child care institutions is limited and practices demand improvement.

Detention of children for alleged association with armed groups

43. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, with UNICEF support, began a justice-for-children project in 2009 that combines prevention, protection, reintegration and restorative justice for children and young people. The Ministry granted UNICEF and its implementing partners access to children in pre-trial

detention to all four facilities in Baghdad and Mosul, and the Ministry of the Interior has allowed access to Al Maqal since 2009. Four mobile legal teams were therefore able to provide assistance to children in pre- and post-trial detention, including children detained because of their alleged association with armed groups. Additionally, concerted advocacy and programmatic efforts by UNICEF and other partners allowed the creation of alternatives to detention While Iraq's juvenile care law indeed provides for alternative measures such as diversion from the criminal justice system, these options have rarely been utilized except for informal applications such as communal dispute resolution.

Psychosocial support

44. To reduce the psychosocial impact of the conflict on children, various interventions have been developed. The Ministry of Education, with the support of UNICEF, re-established the provision of psychosocial assistance to children in schools in vulnerable communities that reached some 50,000 children. More than 1,900 teachers were trained in the provision of psychosocial support to enable them to understand the impact of violence on learning and development. Awareness-raising sessions were also conducted in 70 schools with parents through the parent-teacher association. To complement the psychosocial component in schools, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has developed a framework for a community-based psychosocial programme. Mainstreaming of teacher-training on psychosocial support in schools is being envisaged by the Ministry of Education in coordination with other stakeholders.

Mines and unexploded ordnance

45. The Ministry of the Environment is the lead ministry on mine action and mine risk education and designed a plan in 2008 for medium- to long-term initiatives at the community level. Since 2008, the Ministry, supported by UNICEF, has conducted mine risk education activities that have reached 139,393 children (73,966 boys and 65,427 girls) in 1,700 schools and 109,812 men and 27,453 women from 1,000 communities. In November 2009, Iraq signed the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which prohibits the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of these weapons. In 2010, mine risk education was integrated into teacher-training and school curricula.

Attacks on schools

46. From 2008 and 2010, the United Nations responded to a number of emergencies through IMPACT, a humanitarian initiative aimed at responding to post-conflict emergencies based on a needs assessment in areas of acute vulnerability. For instance, assistance was provided to thousands of families in Sadr City affected by the conflict, including in the form of school rehabilitation. However, the current capacity of the Government to implement construction works and issues of land availability are hindering the progress of the programme. However, UNICEF has assisted the Ministry of Education in improving access to education. A particular focus was given to pupils dropping out of school because of the security concerns through the implementation of accelerated learning programmes, while teachers were also equipped with skills to detect and respond to the needs of children psychologically affected by violence. From 2008 to 2010, 70 schools were rehabilitated or constructed, water and sanitation facilities were

repaired in 174 schools, and prefabricated classrooms were installed in 13 schools, benefiting a total of over 168,400 children (51 per cent girls).

Sexual violence perpetrated against children

47. At the community level, civil society, supported by UNICEF, worked in 16 governorates for prevention, protection and responding to gender-based violence with national and international non-governmental organizations. These activities, which took place between 2008 and 2010, included awareness-raising, life skills and psychosocial, medical and legal services for girls who were the victims of gender-based violence.

VII. Recommendations

48. I condemn in the strongest possible terms the grave violations committed against children, and call upon all to respect the principles of international law, to recognize and maintain the safety and neutrality of schools, hospitals and places of worship and those who work for these institutions, and to declare that they will cease all such attacks. I further condemn the reported practice by Al-Qaida in Iraq of recruiting children as suicide bombers, and call for the immediate disbandment of the Birds of Paradise and request a public declaration to that effect.

49. I urge the Iraqi security forces and United States Forces in Iraq to ensure that their rules of engagement include special protection measures for children and are implemented fully, and I encourage that they request the assistance of UNAMI and UNICEF on appropriate child protection measures in this regard.

50. I recommend that the Ministry of Defence develop appropriate age verification procedures with respect to the Awakening Councils, and that it take appropriate measures to improve the protection of children through a final screening of all remaining Awakening Council members in coordination with child protection partners in Iraq.

51. I strongly encourage the Iraqi security forces to work closely with UNAMI child protection to devise a training regime for the Iraqi security forces on grave child rights violations and to devise an "alert system" to regularly apprise the country task force on monitoring and reporting of possible grave rights violations in real time.

52. I welcome the Government of Iraq's acceptance of the recommendation by the Human Rights Council during the universal periodic review process to adopt measures to criminalize the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. As an immediate measure, I request the Government to conduct investigations and prosecutions of the crime of recruitment and use of children.

53. I further request the Government of Iraq to grant the United Nations and human rights monitoring bodies full access to detention facilities, including all those housing children at any stage of the judicial process. The Government should also work with UNAMI and UNICEF to develop ways and means to prevent prolonged detention and identify alternatives for those children in line with the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

54. I encourage the Government of Iraq to cooperate with the country task force on monitoring and reporting with a view to halting grave violations of children's rights, as stipulated by the Security Council in its resolutions 1612 (2005) and 1882 (2009), and call upon the country task force on monitoring and reporting in Iraq to share information, make recommendations and provide necessary assistance to the Iraq intergovernmental committee on Security Council resolution 1612 (2005).

55. I request the donor community to financially support the United Nations country team, its partners and the Government of Iraq in implementing national programmes and initiatives designed to enhance the protection of children in Iraq, especially those affected by the armed conflict.

56. I call upon civil and religious leaders in Iraq to condemn the use of children as suicide bombers or their use by armed groups publicly, and to engage with the Government of Iraq, UNAMI, UNICEF and other child protection partners to make every child in Iraq safe and secure.

57. I welcome the efforts of my Special Representative in Iraq to strengthen the child protection capacity of UNAMI, including by the deployment of child protection advisers.